

Farmland Conservation Easement Commission

**Jefferson County Courthouse, Room 202
320 S. Main St.
Jefferson, WI 53549**

Monday, April 13, 2009 12:00 pm

Members: John Molinaro (Chairman), Margaret Burlingham (Vice Chairman), Steve Nass (Secretary), Daphne Holterman, Carlton Zentner and County Board Chairman Sharon Schmeling, ex-officio.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Molinaro at 12:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Commission members present included Molinaro, Nass, Holterman and Burlingham. Members absent Schmeling and Zentner. County staff present were Steve Grabow (UW-Extension), Rob Klotz (Zoning) and Michelle Staff (Zoning).

3. Certification of Compliance With Open Meetings Law Requirements

Staff verified that the meeting was being held in compliance with open meetings law requirements.

4. Review of Agenda

The Commission will move up item number 10 after item number 7.

5. Review and Approval of March 23, 2009 Meeting Minutes

Motion by Burlingham, seconded by Nass to approve the March 23, 2009 minutes. **Motion carried** on a voice vote with no objection.

6. Public Comment

None

7. Possible land application for donation of Farmland Conservation Easements

None

8. Proposal of Jim Welsh for possible consultant work for the Farmland Conservation Easement Commission

Welsh from the National Heritage Land Trust was present. He explained the current Land Trusts projects they are working on. The National Heritage Land Trust has 42 easements and approximately half of them are farmland easements. Molinaro explains that the Commission would like assistance to set up a purchase of development rights program. Molinaro states that much of the work is completed, but it is not organized. In addition, Molinaro states the Commission would like to take advantage of grant monies available through other governmental agencies such as the proposed Working Lands Initiative, NRCS, WDNR, etc. Welsh handed the Commission his proposal for working with the Commission and costs associated with their assistance.

Discussion turned to the proposed Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative and the Commission's desire to take advantage of grant monies to purchase development rights. Klotz, Interim Zoning Administrator explains that in order to be qualify for Working Lands, the County must have an updated Agricultural Preservation Plan which would be approved by DATCP. He explains that the Zoning Department was unaware of this proposed change in the Farmland Preservation Program and does not have any monies budgeted for an update. The Working Lands Program has not been passed by the State Legislator at this time, but should be passed within the next two months. Klotz explained to the Commission, to keep Jefferson County in the Farmland Preservation Program and for the Commission to receive grants monies, the County must meet new standards, and it may cost the County additional money. Klotz recommends to the Commission to wait until the new law is passed before spending additional monies because the County may need money to update its Agricultural Preservation Plan.

Molinaro asked Welsh if they could help the Commission meet the new Working Land Initiative Program, specifically the planning section. Welsh stated he could not help the Commission with that and recommend to the Commission they wait until the law is passed before going forward. Molinaro asked the Commission if they proceed with Welsh's proposal or wait until the new Working Land Law is passed. Nass believes the Commission should move forward. Burlingham would like clarification on \$250,000 and what it can be used for. Molinaro explains that \$10,000 is for operation of the Commission and \$250,000 was to purchase easements. Molinaro states that it doesn't mean that the Commission couldn't use some amount of money to update the County's plan. Grabow explains that the County is currently updating the Comprehensive Plan with the emphasis of economic development. Next week, the Economic Development Plan will be presented to the public.

Lyon stated he has been meeting with DATCP and had talked to Jim Matson the key person in writing the new Working Lands rule. Lyon explained that Agricultural Enterprise zones are a pilot program, in addition, DATCP has set aside \$400,000 for grants to local governments to update their plans with the maximum being \$30,000.

There was discussion between the Commission on whether to wait a couple of months for the new law to pass or move forward. Molinaro explained he would like to pull together the work the Commission has already done first, see what is missing, and work on what is missing. Molinaro would like Welsh to help the Commission on this and help with the public information hearings. **Motion** made by Nass, Holterman seconded to hire the Natural Heritage Land Trust up to 100 billed hours and not to exceed \$6,000 to help the Commission on the purchase of development rights program, pending Corporation Counsel review. **Motion carried** on a voice vote with no objection. Molinaro stated that the Agri-business grant may also be used.

The Commission discussed the proposed Working Lands Initiative under this item.

9. Possible Land application for donation of Farmland Conservation Easements

Molinaro read a letter from the Drumlin Area Land Trust asking the Commission to match funds to purchase conservation easements on a 250 acre property in Jefferson County. Land Trust will not give the location of property so the Commission does not know if the land would meet their criteria. The Commission will not consider until they have the entire information on the property. Molinaro will write letter to the Land Trust.

10. Discuss Advisory Board

Molinaro asked the Commission if they wanted to expand the advisory board due to the fact that the Farm Bureau would like a representative on the advisory board. **Motion** by Holterman, **seconded** by Nass to add the Farm Bureau to the Advisory Board, motion carried on a voice vote, with no objection.

11. Commission to identify a target date for PACE applications

Molinaro asked Welsh when he thought the Commission would be ready to accept applications. Welsh hopes to have a public hearing at the end of the summer which would mean that the Commission could possibly accept applications by the end of the year.

12. Discuss whether to rank criteria for purchase of Farmland Conservation Easements

Welsh explained that with limited monies, the Commission will want to make sure they target the type of working land they would like to protect. The Commission discussed current criteria such as percent tillable, soil types, conservation plan, parcel location, local farmland preservation commitment, matching funds availability, landowners willingness to donate, historical scenic, environmental, intergovernmental cooperation and number of splits available.

13. Discuss Easements within the Urban Service Area

Klotz explains that the Cities master plan is incorporated in the County's comprehensive land use plan by State Statutes. It's a policy issue if the Commission wants to use the current urban service area as designated in the current comprehensive plan or use the new urban service area as designated by the city's master plan. Grabow stated that Fort Atkinson is the only municipality with the biggest changes. Molinaro stated that maybe the Commission would accept easements in the urban service area if all parties agree with easement.

14. Suggestions for the Next Agenda

Molinaro asked Staff to contact DATCP and invite them to the Commission next meeting. Welsh will have suggestions on criteria for next meeting. Review current application and modify according for the purchase of development rights.

15. Future Meeting Dates

- a. May 11, 2009 at Noon Room 202
- b. June 8, 2009 at Noon Room 202

16. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:48 p.m. was made by Nass, seconded by Burlingham. Motion carried on a voice vote with no objection.

***The Commission may discuss and/or take action on any item specifically listed on the agenda. Individuals requiring special accommodations for attendance at the meeting should contact the County Administrator at 920-674-7101 24 hours prior to the meeting so appropriate arrangements can be made.

MJS